

Unlikely Parenthood

by Ria the person in the shadows

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Summary: Mariana is a normal 2-year old girl living on one of Earth's outer colonies. But what happens when the Covenant attack and one takes pity on her helplessness? I guess you'll have to read to find out. This is a really shaky first ch, but I try!

1. findings

Disclaimer: I don't own Halo. I wish I did, because then I'd be rich. I do, however, own Spartan-150 also known as Mariana.

Okay, I don't know how good this is going to be, but bear with me please.

[illegible]

Year 2513 - Epsilon Eridani System

The day started out like any other for two-year old Mariana. She would be woken up and gotten ready by her mother, and then after breakfast, she was allowed to go play in the yard all day. As she played, Mariana noticed that everything grew dark really fast. Looking up, and expecting to see rain clouds, Mariana was surprised to see a gigantic ship overhead. She was about to go in and ask her mother about it, when she heard splattering sounds in the street.

Peeking around the corner, Mariana froze in fear as she saw strange creatures walking around and shooting fire at anything that moved. The air was suddenly full of screams, the smell of something burning, and other unpleasant stench that made Mariana gag. Even though she was little, she knew well enough to run and hide, so she started running as fast as she could go to the current safety of the woods behind her house. Before she got very far, however, her house exploded, catching Mariana and throwing her to the ground, knocked her unconscious.

A while later, Elites were patrolling the city, shooting and killing every last human survivor. A cobalt-armored Elite named Daka Adadee was patrolling where Mariana used to live and spotted something moving slightly. Drawing his plasma rifle, Adadee crept closer and saw that the moving object was a "human child." Adadee leveled his gun at the child, and prepared to pull the trigger when something inside of him stopped him.

"Adadee, what are you doing? We have orders to kill every last human," said another cobalt elite named Arkanee as he approached.

Adadee looked at his friend and clicked his mandibles together. "I know," he said, "but I have a feeling that these 'children' are pure and only turn to filth by the influence of their elders. We should take this one to the Holy Ones for studying."

Arkanee clicked his mandibles in thought. "Very well, take the human to the elders, but if the prophets reject this preposterous idea, you will either kill the child, or I will personally throw her out of an airlock," said Arkanee.

Adadee nodded in understanding and scooping Mariana up, walked towards the gravity lift. As he walked, Adadee felt the child cuddle closer to him for comfort. Reaching the gravity lift, Adadee held on tighter to Mariana so that the beam wouldn't pull her from his grasp.

Once inside the ship, Adadee began the walk to the council chambers. The walk wasn't far, and Adadee soon found himself in front of the council. Adadee bowed down and waited for the prophets to acknowledge him.

"Adadee, why have you come to the council uncalled for?" demanded the head Prophet.

Adadee remained bowing and brought forth Mariana. "Holy one, I have brought you a human specimen to study. It is my belief that the children, such as this one, are born pure and only become filth when they are taught and influenced by their human elders," Adadee said.

The council was shocked. Never before had a covenant brought a specimen that was alive and supposedly untainted. The head prophet was interested also and made his decision rather quickly.

"Very well Adadee, I will go along with this to see if this child, raised as a covenant, will grow up to be filth like her elders. However, since you proposed this idea, you, Daka Adadee, will raise her. You are dismissed," said the prophet.

Adadee took his leave and picking up the still sleeping Mariana carefully, headed back to his own quarters. When he reached there, Adadee saw Arkanee waiting for him.

"You were gone long, what was the result?" asked Arkanee sitting on his bed.

"I am to raise her," replied Adadee as he laid Mariana on his bed carefully. It was weird; he was starting to feel a bond with the

child.

Arkane whistled. "You must have someone important smiling down on you," he said impressed.

"I guess," replied Adadee suddenly turning his attention to the child on the bed as she started to wake up.

Mariana was extremely groggy. She had no clue where she was, except that she knew that she was no longer at home—wherever that was. Raking her brain, she realized that she couldn't remember what her home, or her family looked like. She could only remember her name: Mariana. Opening her eyes, she saw two creatures looking at her, and started trembling in fear.

"It's all right little one," said one of them, "No one will hurt you here."

"What 's your name?" asked Arkanee.

"I'm Mariana."

"You know," said Arkaneer switching back to Elite, "You should give her an Elite name."

"Any suggestions?" asked Adadee.

"Well, I was thinking Mari Anamee," replied Arkanee with a shrug.

"I like that," said Adadee trailing off as he felt a pair of arms wrap themselves around what would be the equivalent of his waist, and a small voice say, "Daddy."

Arkanees let out a small "Wort wort wort." "The squirt almost said your name," he said continuing to laugh.

"Didn't you pay attention in lessons gas sucker?" challenged Adadee using their nickname for grunts as an insult.

"Are you implying something?"

"'Daddy' is what human children called their fathers," said Adadee with a roll of his eyes and a click of his mandibles. Looking down at Mariana, he stroked her hair. "Your name is now Mari Anamee," Adadee told her.

Mariana blinked up at him and smiled, no longer afraid of him. "Okay, daddy," she replied curling up on his lap.

"How old are you?" asked Arkanee. Mariana replied by holding up two fingers. "Adadee, you should train her to be an Elite warrior. That would be a true test of this experiment," he stated.

Adadee nodded in agreement and suddenly laughed. "This is an unlikely parenthood," he said picking Mariana up and then standing, went in search of a suitable bed for his new "daughter."

[illegible]

her into the room they had been standing outside of and stopped her.

"All right, Anamee, open your eyes," came Arkanee's voice.

Mariana made a face at her Elite name, but obeyed. Opening her eyes, Mariana was curious about the pod that was in front of her. Looking at Adadee, she gave him a questioning look.

"It's a stimulation pod. We programmed it to teach you how to fly each vehicle that we own. There's Shades, which you can already work, Ghosts, Wraiths, Banshees, Seraphs, and every space ship that you can think of," Adadee explained. Watching Mariana's indigo eyes clear of all confusion, replaced by excitement, he smiled.

"When can I start learning?"

Arkanee laughed. "Immediately," he replied.

A few months later, after Mariana mastered the pod and the prophet language, she and Adadee were summoned to the council. Entering the council chambers, Mariana looked around at all of the prophets' solemn faces and got a very bad feeling. Kneeling down in respect next to her father, Mariana heard the Prophet of Virtue speak.

"Adadee," he said, "From what I've heard, it seems to me that we finally have a conclusion on your hypothesis."

"Yes Holy one, I have found my hypothesis to be quite accurate. Humans are influenced by their elders. Marian isn't filth like them," said Adadee. Mariana was confused by his words. What did Daddy mean when she said she wasn't filth? Before she could ask him, the Prophet of Regret spoke.

"I see. Well, since the experiment is quite complete, I believe that Mariana will not need to stay here any longer," the Prophet of Regret said.

Adadee stood suddenly and pulled Mariana to him tightly. "You will not take my Anamee away from me!" he roared. Mariana was frightened. They wanted to separate her and her father? What did they do wrong?

The Prophet of Regret glared and snapped his fingers. Out of the shadows came Tartarus and his goon squad of Brutes. Seeing them, Adadee held on to Mariana tighter and muttered in her ear, "Don't forget me. They plan on sending you to a human colony. I will keep them from separating us for a while, but you must hang on."

Mariana nodded and clung to his waist as tight as she could. Feeling one of the brutes' hands on her trying to pry her from her father, she held on tighter.

While that Brute pried at Mariana, three others worked on Adadee. Two on his arms, and one to pull him off. Adadee, feeling his grip slacken slightly, he unhooked something around his neck and dropped it around Mariana's neck with a mandible. "Use that to find me one day," he whispered as they slowly separated. Finally the two were separated, and Mariana was carried out kicking and screaming while

Adadee was held in place by two of the Brutes. As Mariana's last cries of "Daddy" faded from his hearing, Adadee felt despair course through him and gave up struggling, slumping to his knees.

Mariana didn't give up, though. She kicked and fought until Tartarus finally had to knock her out. Putting her in a drop pod for transportation, he launched her into space and towards the nearest colony, which was a hundred kilometers away.

On Reach, some time later, civilians of a city saw something streak overhead and land in the forest a klick away. Hurrying towards the object, they were surprised to see a single person escape pod with a little girl inside. Seeing that she was unconscious, a civilian picked her up and took her to the hospital.

Mariana started regaining consciousness and heard a strange dialect around her. Opening her eyes, she saw creatures that looked like her standing over her bed looking down at her. Panicking, because she couldn't understand them, Mariana spoke to them in every language she knew: Grunt, Jackal, Hunter, Brute, Prophet, Engineer, and even her own beloved Elite tongue. Sadly, they just shook their head and tried to communicate in their tongue that sounded familiar, yet foreign to Mariana's ears.

"The poor thing," said one of the nurses as the girl babbled to them using weird sounds, "Something must be wrong with her."

The other nurse nodded and injected something into the girl's arm to calm her down. The girl looked furious for a second, and then calmed down and settled for glaring darkly at them while making a clicking sound at them. (Ria: basically, she would be clicking her mandibles if she had themâ€| hence the clicking sound)

A while later, Mariana was trying to find an escape route, when her attention was distracted by a holo panel that started glowing. Pressing a button curiously, Mariana leaped back making excited Grunt sounds, surprised as a transparent figure appeared on the panel. The figure was a female with flowing hair and was dressed as an Ancient Egyptian queen.

"Hello child," she said in such a soothing voice, that even though Mariana couldn't understand it, made her come closer, "My name is Iris. I am going to teach you this language, your language."

Mariana sat on her bed and merely looked at Iris. 'What a pretty name,' she thought, and felt something suddenly clamp onto her wrists, holding her down. Struggling against the bindings, she became aware of something akin to tentacles attach to her head. Ceasing her struggles, Mariana felt a wealth of information flow through her head.

"Is that better?" asked Iris putting down a scroll of papyrus that she was holding.

Mariana's eyes shot open. She could understand the hologram now. "I-I think so," she replied testing out her newly acquired language. This language, English, was rough and crude to her ears. It didn't flow like her Elite language, and there were really no hidden meanings to the words. "What are you?" she asked curiously as the "tentacles" and bindings retracted.

"I am an Artificial Intelligence, or AI for short," explained Iris, "And now that we can speak the same language, I am going to ask you two questions. First of all, how old are you, and secondly, what is your name?"

Mariana thought for a second. "I'm five, and my name is Mariana," she said, her indigo eyes tearing as she remembered the harsh separation from her father. Iris, sensing Mariana's sadness, wrote something down on the papyrus scroll and disappeared.

As Mariana grew well and was moved from the hospital to an orphanage, she learned not to trust people much. Instead of playing gravball or other games with the rest of the children, she would do her soldier exercises that Adadee had taught her. After she finished her "workout," she would spar with a tree. The orphanage runners tried everything to get her to stop, making Mariana withdraw from their help even more. Finally they gave up and just coiled rope on the tree to make Mariana's kicks and punches not hurt her hands and feet. This continued on a daily basis until Mariana turned six and was visited by Dr. Catherine Hasley.

Dr. Hasley and Lieutenant Keyes walked into the orphanage and up to the front desk. "Hello," said Dr. Hasley, "my husband and I are looking for a child to adopt." (If you've read the Halo: The Fall of Reach book, you'll understand what I mean when I say that they're not really married.)

"Well, you've come to the right place," laughed the secretary, "Any preferences?"

"We are looking for a girl around six years old, and preferably has black hair," said Dr. Hasley.

The secretary stirred uneasily. "We have one who fits that description," she said pulling up the profile of Mariana, "but she's quite rebellious, and withdraws from the adults and playing with any of the other kids."

"I would like to see her," said Dr. Hasley. The secretary nodded and led them to a set of glass doors.

"All of the children are outside," she said opening the door for Hasley and Keyes, "The child that you want to see is near a tree with rope around it."

The two nodded and headed outside and looked around. Sure enough, there was a tree with rope coiled around it, and a little black-haired girl sparring with it. Walking over to her, Dr. Hasley saw the girl suddenly stop and just watch warily as Dr. Hasley drew closer.

"Hello, My name is Catherine, what's yours?" Dr. Hasley asked. The girl gave her an icy stare and fingered a necklace around her neck.

"I'm Mariana," she muttered after a pause.

"Well Mariana, I think that's a lovely name. Can I ask you why you don't play with the others?"

Mariana looked at Dr. Hasley and gave a small, barking laugh. "I don't bother with such childish antics. My father was training me to be the best soldier that I could be. I was so advanced, that before we wereâ€| attacked, I was training with junior officers," she said proudly watching Dr. Hasley's face take on a look of surprise. "You aren't going to try to make me change my ways, are you? Just like those other shrinks they sent to reason with me, right?" Mariana asked losing the cocky tone that was in her voice, replacing it with concern.

"Wouldn't dream of it. I just wanted to ask you that. Now, I'm busy, so I must go, but I suspect that we'll see each other again soon," said Dr. Hasley standing up and walking off with a little wave. Mariana watched her go, reminded strongly of her own father, the only ones who technically had ever cared for her. With this new feeling, Mariana fiddled with the necklace Adadee had given her, wondering if her and her father would ever be reunited again.

Going back to her room, she sat on her bed and pushed a button on a portable pad next to her bed. Iris had explained how an AI was made, and at Mariana's insistence, created one for her using a clone of Mariana's brain. (Ria: an AI is made from a selected person's neural impulses, but the process decays tissue, so Iris used a clone to preserve Mariana's brain.)

This AI, named Ameer, had Mariana's attitude and knew every UNSC dirty trick in the book. Knowing Mariana's tastes for cold beauty, Ameer had taken the form of a person made of precious stones that glittered with data. Appearing on the data pad, Ameer yawned and stretched.

"Done already? I'm sure you're still supposed to be outside," Amee said looking at Mariana with garnet eyes. Mariana laughed and making sure she was alone, she replied in her favorite tongue.

"I skipped out, so what?" she said. Amee rolled her eyes.

"I only speak english, you know that," Ameer snapped.

"I know, that's what's so fun about it," Mariana giggled, switching to human.

Amee sat down crosslegged, her form turning to sapphires with emerald eyes, a sign that she was thinking of something. "What did those two want?" she asked.

"I don't know, the lady asked me something and then left looking satisfied. Maybe we're getting out of here," Mariana said shrugging and laying back on her bed. "I wish I were back withâ€¦ daddy. I miss him a lot."

Amee sighed, turning onyx with ruby eyes, oblivious to the fact that Mariana knew everything about the Covenant, and her father was an Elite. "We'll find him one day," she promised. Mariana smiled, and putting Amee in sleep mode, curled up on her bed and fell asleep.

[illegible]

Ria: hums a little tune I love no school. I really wanted to write more, but then I'd get carried away. Oh well. R&R please!

3. AI's and a lesson learned

Disclaimer: I don't own Halo. I wish I did, because then I'd be rich. I do, however, own Spartan-150 also known as Mariana.

A/N: okay, I'm going to take a little from the fall of reach novel, but I'll change it around a bit so you perfectionists out there will be satisfied and not get me into trouble. Sticks out tongue
Enjoy

[illegible]

September 23, 2517- Reach Military complex, planet Reach

It's been a month since Dr. Hasley visited Mariana. Dr. Hasley now stood waiting on a platform in the complex's amphitheater.

"Ready for the children, doctor?" asked her AI, Dã©jã .

Dr. Hasley nodded, and the amphitheater doors opened and in filed the seventy-five chosen candidates for the Spartan project led by Chief Petty Officer Mendez. The children moved with a groggy slowness, symbolizing that they just woke up from their drugged sleep. Each child was accompanied by a handler who guided them to their seats. Dr. Hasley looked at the children and spotted numbers 117 and 150, John and Mariana, her two best candidates for the SPARTANII project. John didn't look frightened, just confused, and Mariana— Dr. Hasley couldn't help but smile as every time Mariana's handler put a hand on her shoulder, Mariana would break free and kick him in the shins while clutching something that looked like a hologram panel to her chest.

"Welcome children, you have been chosen to be trained to the best of your abilities. You will become the protectors of Earth and all of her colonies. Unfortunately, you will not be able to return to your families," Dr. Hasley said trying to explain.

At these words, the children stirred uneasily and shifted around. Only Mariana remained still, and merely fingered her necklace. After a little while of more explaining, the children were herded by CPO Mendez and their trainers to dinner and then to bed. Mariana, all throughout dinner, wanted to talk to Amee, who she kept clutched to her body in the holo pad, but figured that it wouldn't be the wisest thing to do.

Before bed, the trainers lined the children up and made them hand over whatever possessions that they happened to have with them. When they came to John, he kicked and struggled against the men as they tried to pry a small metal disk from his hand. Mariana, watching, wondered why he was putting up such a fight about a disk, and realized that it must have sentimental value to him just like her necklace was precious to her. Continuing down the line, the guards finally came to Mariana and tried to pull the holo pad out of her grasp.

"Let go!" she cried as the guards pulled the pad from her hold and

also took off her necklace and started walking away. "Give back my necklace!" she screamed as she ran after them and tackled the one who held her necklace. The trainers managed to pull her off after a minute, only to have another child fly into the fray and attack the guard that Mariana was beating up.

"What's going on here?!" demanded Mendez coming into the room with Dr. Hasley right behind him. The room became very quiet and still. Mariana looked at the other kid who had come to help her out, and saw it was the one who they had taken the disk from.

"Sir, these brats started trouble," said one of the handlers.

"They took my necklace and my friend!" Mariana shouted slipping easily out of the grasp of the handler who restrained her.

"Your friend?" asked Dr. Hasley confused. Mariana nodded and pulling the pad towards her, pushed a button and Amee appeared, shimmering different stone colors and finally settling for her onyx colored body with piercing ruby eyes.

"Yes her friend," Amee snapped, "That was quite rude of you to take Mariana's only friend away from her."

Dr. Hasley seeing Mariana's training evident in the fierce stance that the little girl was in, knelt down to her height, and looked into the blazing indigo eyes. "I have an AI friend too. Her name is DÃ©jÃ . How about I have your AI?"

"Amee."

"Amee stay with her. You'll be able to see her daily," suggested Dr. Hasley.

The fire cooled in Mariana's eyes. "Fine," she conceded, "but I want my necklace back. It was given to me by my father."

Dr. Hasley sighed, nodded, and handed the necklace to Mariana who put it on immediately.

"Go to bed now trainees," barked Mendez and the children hurriedly complied.

Later that night, John was awakened by a soft whimpering sound. Creeping over to the bunk next to him, that the sound was coming from, John saw it was the girl with the AI. Shaking her awake, he jumped back and stared as she flailed upon instinct. Opening her eyes, she looked gazes with John and slightly grinned sheepishly.

"Sorry," she whispered pulling her knees to her chin and shook with more quiet cries.

John sat on the edge of her bed and comforted the girl as best as he could. "It's ok. I'm John by the way, what's your name?" he asked curiously.

The girl looked up. "I'm Mariana," she said.

"What were you dreaming about?"

Mariana visibly shuddered. "Tartarus," she whispered fearfully.

John was puzzled. "Who?" he asked.

"Tartarus split me and my father a year ago when I was in space training to be a soldier," Mariana explained, "He took the only family that I had away."

John sympathized for Mariana. "I'll be your family like Dr. Hasley said. I don't know what's going to happen to us, but I know we have to stick together to pull through this," John said. Mariana smiled wearily.

"Thanks, we should sleep. I have a feeling we'll be put through a lot tomorrow," Mariana said hugging John quickly. John nodded and crept back to his bunk where he fell asleep almost immediately.

"Wake up boot!" came a harsh yell. John sleepily ignored him and went back to sleep. Bad choice. Mendez bent over and grinning triumphantly, touched John's feet with an electric baton. Mariana looked tiredly on as John yelled and fell out of the bed in surprise. Realizing that would happen to her if she didn't get up, Mariana stood up and moved to the foot of the bed and awaited orders.

As the other children were awakened, Mendez cleared his throat, eyes glittering. "I am Chief Petty Officer Mendez," he shouted, the others are your trainers. You will do as they say at all times. The showers are in the back. Wash and return here to get dressed," he barked. The seventy-five children ran and showered. Then they rushed back and dressed in sweats and combat boots.

"Outside trainees, triple time! MARCH!" yelled Mendez flourishing his baton. Basically stampeding outside, John saw Mariana close by in quiet thought, but not disoriented like the others. Once on the grass, the trainers herded them into lines of fifteen, Mariana next to John in line two.

"We'll start our day, every day with some exercise. Start with jumping jacks and count off to one hundredâ€¦ go!" Mendez barked starting the exercise. Once they were done with those, it was on to sit-ups followed by push-ups, deep squats, knee bends and finally leg lifts. Once they finished, Mendez gave them a break. Gulping down his water, John looked around and saw the other children on the ground panting, throwing up, and clutching their sides except one. Mariana was sitting calmly on the grass sipping her water. Other than being extremely sweaty, she looked unfazed to John. Before he could ask her about it, Mendez stood up.

"Excellent start, trainees," he said, "Now we run."

John and Mariana ran side by side, John struggling, and Mariana easily jogging along. Seeing him lag, Mariana slowed slightly and handed him her water bottle, which was still three quarters full. "Here," she said at his questioning look, "Drink a little and match your stride with mine."

John did as told and soon found the run easier, even though his muscles killed him. After a bit, the children found themselves in a courtyard in front of a building where an AI was waiting for them on

the top step.

"All right children, come on, the class is about to start. I'm DÃ©jÃ and I'll be your teacher," she said turning to them.

John and some others groaned. The AI smiled and started to enter the building. "Of course you can continue your workout if you prefer to skip," she said. Mariana looked at John and they led the way up the steps. Entering the building, John saw a plate of crackers and milk for each of them. While eating, he watched Mariana go over to DÃ©jÃ and ask her something. DÃ©jÃ pointed to a desk and Mariana rushed over to the black pad that was on the desk and return to where she was sitting. Amee appeared as soon as Mariana pushed the button and turned an amethyst color with topaz eyes and sat on the pad's surface. DÃ©jÃ began the lesson by projecting a solid landscape on the floor of the entire classroom.

"Please, walk around the land and try to find what I will be showing you," she said gesturing to the map. John and the others, accepting the challenge, got up and wandered around walking in the water that actually felt wet to their fingers when they bent down to touch it. Mariana, however walked to the tallest mountain, and sitting on the top, looked around and spotted something moving.

"There's people in this!" she exclaimed pointing. As the children gathered around, Amee magnified it so now they were wandering a mountain pass watching three hundred people guard it against thousands. DÃ©jÃ explained about the battle between the Persians and the Spartans and how the Spartans won though greatly outnumbered. DÃ©jÃ faded the image away and dismissed them to go to the playground. While Mendez explained the rules of their objective, The trainees formed three lines and waited for the go signal. Mariana was behind John, so they weren't on the same team, which made it more interesting.

At the signal, Mariana and her team saw John race ahead of everyone. 'He'll lose,' Mariana thought with a smirk and helped her team around the booby traps that were on the ground. Mariana's team of James and Li ended up being the second complete team to finish. Once everybody crossed the finish line, Mendez announced that everyone but team three, John, Kelly, and Sam, would be having dinner that night for winning. Mariana found it amusing until dinner when she saw John looking miserable with only a liter of water to drink. Making her clicking sound, Mariana made sure the trainers and Mendez weren't looking and slid her seconds of turkey, potatoes, and corn over to John. John glanced at her gratefully and wolfing the food down quickly, slid the empty plate back to Mariana. For dessert, James this time sent his thirds over to John to eat. Looking down the table, Mariana pantomimed to Li and Linda to get Kelly and Sam something too. This time, Mendez caught them.

"What do you think you are doing trainee?" he yelled in Mariana's face. Mariana just stood and looked at him coolly.

"Easyâ€|sir," she replied with a sneer, "I was giving my teammates food."

"They didn't earn it trainee, they don't eat food tonight because of their lack of teamwork," Mendez barked.

Mariana's indigo eyes blazed. "If they don't eat," she snarled, her voice taking on what sounded to Mendez like an Elite's tone, "Then I don't either." With that, she sat down and pushed her plate away towards the center of the table and glared defiantly at Mendez. The others looked at each other and as one, pushed their plates away to the center also.

Mendez tried not to smile. The brat learned quickly. She will make a fine Spartan. "Thomas!" he barked and a trainer came up.

"Yes sir?" Thomas asked.

Mendez kept his eyes on Mariana's. "Soldier," he said, "Get more plates. These children still look hungry."

The trainees couldn't believe it. Mariana had actually won against their instructor. When new plates were set in front of them all, the seventy-five children dug in to the desserts together.

[illegible]

Ria: man, when I want to write, I write quickly. This took me a day to do, and my teacher says I shouldn't focus so much on fan fiction stories and stick with regular ideasâ€¦feh. Read and review! Oh yes, I'll start review responses next chapter.

4. secret revealed and death of a comrade

Disclaimer: I don't own Halo. I wish I did, because then I'd be rich. I do, however, own Spartan-150 also known as Mariana.

Ria: giggles whee! I love reviews. Well, I guess I'll go in chronological order with these responses. Those of you who aren't interested in these may skip by the responses.

****Spacefan:**** my first reviewer. Does a little dance To tell the truth, I have no idea what "wort, wort, wort" means. I have Halo for the computer, and if I have to guess, I'd have to say that it's a laugh and/or a pleased sound. I know this because, 1. I was spotted by an Elite, he wort, wort, wort's me. 2. he kills me, wort, wort, worts, and then evil laughs to rub it in my face. And 3. On the truth and reconciliation level, those invisible Elites that slaughter the Marines in the control room were wort wort worting before I entered and proceeded to blow their brains outâ€¦ any more questions?

****White Leader:**** shrugs I just type what I feel like typing. I never hold my stories in high regard because I'm not that good of a writer.

****Chuey:**** thanks, and do my other chapters answer your wondering? I'm thinking that I'm going to have them meet up again somehow somewhere.

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**WireSpeed:** so many people like my fic! cries tears of happiness
â€¦ I'm over it. Jk.
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**tru7h nd 0rd3r:** someone already did this idea? Oi, I didn't even
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know that. thinks okay, I know what I'm going to do with this now to make it uniquely my own.

****Night Spirit1:**** Waitâ€¦| Night Spirit1? â€¦| laughs YSF finally got you to read one of my fics? Oh this is too funny, I figured you were too stubborn to read stories that she recommended. Actually, this fic was her idea, but she gave it to me because she says she has too much to work on already. Yes Halo does rule! XD.

****Gregoriev:** ****I'm** curious on how you got confused. In the first chapter, Mariana is two, and in ch 2, The story skips forward three years. Look at the top of the actual chapter part. I put the year of that chapter there. As for the junior officers, I needed her to be more special than regular humans. Mariana has the ability to pick up on things quite quickly, hence her advanced placement in ranks. looks through chapters Yeah, I see what you mean by my characters becoming out of character suddenly, but I'm eccentric and tend to get carried away, so blame me, not them. I don't own an Xbox. I have, however played Halo 2 twice at my friend, Tina's house. I like energy swordsâ| sweatdrop okay, I'll fix the second chapter a little, but not by a lot.

**White Leader: **you know, you're the only one to review twice so far. I take it you haven't read the fall of Reach book, so I'll explain to the best of my ability. Captain Keyes accompanied Dr. Hasley as basically a bodyguard when she went around to screen the 150 children that were possible candidates for the SpartanII project to select the best 75. He was only a Lieutenant back then, and earned the title of Captain 35 years later according to the book.

****PMOHWinters:**** Think so? I think my story is mediocre. But then again, writer's worst critics are themselves.

HobbitNinja: **I have the complete trilogy. I don't want you to rush through the Flood, but First Strike is by far the best. It ties up all of the loose ends left off in both previous books.

****Halo2girl:**** okay, okay. Lol keep your hair on!

Mariana: Ria, did you have to wait so long to respond? These responses take up two pages! You better not cut parts out of the chapter.

Ria: hehe, I'll just type more. You're going to like this chapter Mariana.

Mariana: I'm soo
ecstatic.

[illegible]

March 30, 2525- UNSC Carrier Atlas

Mariana stood at attention next to Sam and watched without emotion as ash canisters containing the Spartans that didn't survive the augmentation process were jettisoned into space. Even though she spent the last eight years training, learning, and basically living with them, she didn't feel as attached to them as she should have.

They were merely acquaintances. Now on the other hand if it were an Elite like Arkanee or Adadee, then she would feel something for them. Listening idly to John's and Mendez's conversation about how sometimes leaders had to send their soldiers to death for the greater good, she decided that humans were stupid. Once dismissed, she headed back to her quarters and activated her holo panel.

"Hello Mariana, how are you feeling?" asked Ameer appearing life-sized due to the projectors set up around the room. Mariana scowled and covered her eyes with her hands, laying back on the bed.

"Like crap, and that's an understatement," she muttered. Ameer thought for a second and turned the lights down so they didn't hurt Mariana's eyes.

"You just have to get used to your new abilities. I'm sure the pain will go away soon," Ameer soothed sitting on the floor. Mariana sighed and ran a hand over her shaved head.

"I wish they didn't shave my hair off though," she muttered. Ameer gave a small laugh.

"You gave them a real hard time about it when they approached you. Needless to say, it was amusing," Ameer said, looking over and seeing that Mariana was almost asleep. Turning the lights fully off, Ameer disappeared into the hologram pad so Mariana could sleep in peace.

About a month later, Mariana was sitting on the floor of her quarters amusing herself by tinkering with some electronics, trying to manipulate them into useful, efficient technology.

"Mariana, what are you doing?" asked John coming into her room. Mariana rewarded him with a bored stare and went back to tinkering without even saluting him. John sat next to her and watched her hands fly rapidly over the electronics. "I see you're using the effects of the augmentation to your advantage," he remarked casually picking a part of it up and examining it before having it be taken out of his hands, "What are you making?"

Mariana paused and grinned. "Something that will help our next training mission," she replied sarcastically.

"Mind elaborating?" John asked, well used to her defiance of calling anyone sir or ma'am something that he was well accustomed to and couldn't care less about, but it drove Mendez crazy and she was constantly taking heat from him because of it.

"Give me a minute and I'll demonstrate," she said adding the last parts to it and snapping a plastic casing over the whole thing. Standing up, she tossed John an infrared helmet and walked to the other side of the room.

"Ameer can you turn off the lights? Full darkness mode if you don't mind," she said facing the holo pad. Immediately the lights snapped off and John donned the helmet.

"Now what?" he asked curiously.

"Activate the helmet and then try to find me," came Mariana's voice.

John complied and looking around, spotted Mariana's thermal signature. He did a double take. Mariana's signature was fading from sight!

"We already have coolant suits," John said about to remove the helmet.

"Switch to night vision and try to locate me then," Mariana taunted.

John switched the setting and scanned the room and found nothing. Suddenly his screen filled with Mariana's eyes. Falling back, he saw the lights go back on and Mariana, laughing, remove the helmet.

"Useful little bugger, ain't it?" she asked with a grin. John sat up and laughed too.

"Very," he replied with a smile, "So it blocks infrared and night vision. What else can it do?"

"Basically it makes you invisible. I'm not completely done with it because I became visible, but I know it will be useful to us on missions once it's fixed, especially with the Tango Company," Mariana said opening the casing again and returning to tinkering. John knew she didn't like being bugged while she was working on inventions, so he left.

Hearing the door close, Mariana waited a minute and put the machine away, pulling out another. This one was a purple metal with graceful, lighter purple designs on it. Opening it up, Mariana grinned as the little machine lit up and started pulsing.

"What is that?" asked Ameer appearing close by.

Mariana glared at her. "Something that I can't let anyone see for my father's own protection, so forgive me for what I'm about to do," she said putting the item in a box and entering a computer. Finding Ameer's core, she wiped Ameer's memory clean of the object. Ameer flashed multiple colors and then turned garnet with golden eyes.

"Ameer, I'm putting you in sleep mode for a while. You're processing too much," Mariana said typing a command into her computer. Ameer in response disappeared. Pulling the item back out, Mariana took off her necklace and inserted it into a special slot. Immediately covenant language scrolled across the little screen. As Mariana's eyes followed the familiar and welcoming words, she jumped in surprise and wonder as a star map appeared. Hooking the covenant computer to the projectors, she made sure that the door was locked and turned to the star map that now occupied her room. Gazing at the map of the galaxy, she spotted Sol, and saw two NAV markers blinking. Touching the indigo one, she smiled as the map zoomed up and showed their position on patrol in the Lambda Serpentis system and her Covenant name under the NAV marker.

Returning to the big view of the galaxy, Mariana touched the dark red NAV marker. Watching the map zoom up, she noticed the feedback appear in midair. Reading the covenant symbols, Mariana's eyes widened as her indigo irises reread the words. If she was interpreting this

correctly, and she knew she was, then this NAV marker was pointing to Adadee's location in Covenant held space on the other side of the galaxy. Zooming up even more, she was rewarded with the image of a planet. The symbols underneath said that this was the Elite's home planet.

"Father," she murmured in Elite, "I know now what you mean by using my necklace to find you. I promise that we'll find a way to reunite once again."

November 27, 2525- UNSC Frigate _Commonwealth_

John looked over concerned at Mariana. For the whole trip, she hadn't said a word. All she had done was play with her necklace and stare out the view screen when they emerged from Slipspace. When they were in Slipspace, she had just worked on repairing her "invisibility" machine and didn't even talk to Amee or anyone.

"Mariana, what's wrong?" he asked going over. Mariana tore her gaze away from the view screen and solemnly looked into his eyes.

"Something's about to happen," she said so quietly that John, even with his sharpened hearing could barely hear her.

"What something?" he asked grabbing her shoulders. Mariana opened her mouth to speak, but was cut off by a transmisson.

"Spartans 117 and 150 report to the bridge immediately," came Dr. Hasley's voice over the loudspeaker. John and Mariana looked at each other and left for the bridge.

Stepping onto the bridge, John saluted and Mariana just stood there, once again not showing proper respect to a higher ranking officer.

"Over here you two," Dr. Hasley said returning her gaze to a radar screen. Going over, Mariana looked at the radar screen and saw a blip that wasn't their ship. As soon as she saw it, she looked quickly at the view screen that pointed in that direction. Her eyes widened as her experienced eyes spotted a shadow that blocked out stars. Blinking, she saw that the ship had vanished and knew immediately what it was.

'So,' she thought, 'they're here.'

Listening idly to the conversation between John, Dr. Hasley, and Captain Wallace, Mariana grew irritated with their incorrect information. "Look," she said getting their attention, "That 'ghost' is a covenant ship and it's making an intrasystem jump right for us. If we don't hurry to Chi Ceti 4, your ship and all of us on it will be vaporized particles."

"And how would you know this? I will not have my command second guessed by a Petty Officer first class, so keep your mouth shut!" Captain Wallace barked.

No sooner had he said that, then the collision alarm sounded and green lights appeared on the radar screen.

Mariana only had time to let a satisfied smirk cross her face before John grabbed her and held on tight, bracing both of them for impact. It never came. Instead a covenant ship, roughly a third of the _Commonwealth's _size, appeared three thousand kilometers away.

The covenant ship and the _Commonwealth _traded blows for a few minutes until Mariana saw a lateral line of red appear on the hull of the covenant ship and knew what was coming.

"You have to engage evasive maneuvers! They are going to fire plasma and we're at point blank range!" Mariana said running a hand through her short black hair as a sign of agitation.

"That's the second time you've spoken out of turn. One more time and I'll have you gagged since the doors are sealed so you can't leave the bridge," Captain Wallace snapped.

John saw Mariana's eyes flash and laid a hand on her shoulder as she was going to reply. "Let it go," he murmured as she looked at him with rage in her eyes. Mariana watched the plasma arc and hit the ship wishing that this was a simulator that she could end at any time, and Adadee would be right outside of the pod waiting for her.

John kept an eye on Mariana and hoped that this change in attitude was only temporary. Finally the battle was over and the two Spartans and Dr. Hasley were headed to their Pelican in the launch bay.

"What's gotten into you Mariana?" asked Dr. Hasley summing up what John was wondering, "You're usually never this impolite."

Mariana cast her gaze to the floor. "I'veâ€| just been caught up in a lot of things lately. This battle, it reminded me of my father. We were separated by the covenant," she said.

John nodded in understanding. "I understand that, but what I want to know is how you knew what the covenant would be doing as they did it. You even knew that the plasma would turn to hit us," John said.

"Mariana, is there something that you're hiding from us?" asked Dr. Hasley.

Mariana looked at her necklace as if it would tell her how to answer. "There's one thing that I've never told anyone, not even Amee. Iâ€|I know all of the Covenant's ways, because I am truly Covenant at heart," Mariana replied hesitantly.

"What do you mean you're covenant at heart? You're human," John asked.

Mariana raised her eyes and looked at Dr. Hasley and John with an intense stare. "My father's name is Daka Adadee. He's an Elite who raised me to be like him, so if that's a problem, then shoot me now," she said, holding her head up proudly.

John stepped back instinctively. All this time Mariana had deceived him and the others. He didn't know what to think. Luckily the lift stopped just then and the doors were opening. John glanced behind him

and said in a firm tone: "We tell no one. Mariana, I don't know yet if you're to be trusted fully anymore, but know this. I will be keeping my eye on you at all times. You're too valuable to the covenant if they get their hands on you."

"The covenant thinks I'm dead. A brute that I told you about named Tartarus knew I was still alive, but doesn't know that I retained my memory of what Adadee taught me. I have no reason to rejoin the Covenant. You have nothing to worry about," Mariana snapped marching over to where Fred was and helped him finish fueling up the Pelican.

"What do you think Dr. Hasley? Can we trust Mariana?" John asked helping the doctor out of the lift.

Dr. Hasley sighed. "I have just as much information about her as you do. I have a feeling though, that Mariana was telling the truth. Don't let your friendship be ruined over a thing like that, but keep an eye on her just in case," she replied as they walked over to the pelican.

About an hour later, The Spartans were trying out their MJOLINR armor. John, experimenting with his helmet as he ran through the obstacle course, found that he could identify each Spartan in their armor. Looking around, he spotted Mariana practicing agility maneuvers. As he watched, John noticed her moves were over powerful, launching her over a three meter high wall effortlessly with about a meter of room to spare.

"Mariana, clam down, You're going to hurt yourself if you continue like that," John said on a private COM channel calmly to get her focused on being deliberate for now.

"_Why do you care? I'm covenant after all,"_ she snarled over the intercom.

"_Leave her alone, John," _Dr. Hasley said from the control booth, "_Let her cool down. She's afraid that you'll reject her from the group or something."_

"How do you know this doctor?" John asked. John was rewarded with a laugh for an answer.

"_I've known all of you for so long that I know what's bothering you by your movements,"_ she explained.

John nodded and concentrated on getting the group focused. Once everyone was gathered, and John had coaxed Mariana over, the Spartans headed back up to space after hearing that the covenant ship had returned. Mariana sat in the very back of the pelican and took a quick glance around.

Seeing that no one was paying attention to her, or looking in her direction, she shifted her gloved hand and revealed her necklace. Sliding it into a neural slot in the back of her helmet that Dr. Hasley had specifically made for it since Mariana had told her that it was a mini computer chip, Mariana pulled up the star map and double-checked Adadee's position. Selecting the silver NAV marker that had replaced the red NAV marker, Mariana noted that her beloved father wasn't anywhere near them.

"Mariana," came John's voice.

"What?" Mariana asked, turning off the star map.

"I need you the most on what we're going to do. We're going to blow up the covenant ship from the inside. I need you to guide us through the ship to the energy reactors. Are you up for this?"

Mariana sighed. "I'll help, but only because they attacked us first," she replied. Mariana heard a small laugh from John before he snapped the COM line off.

A little while later, Sam, Kelly, John, and Mariana were crouched outside a door, checking an uploaded schematic of the ship from their neural sensors. Finally opening the door, the foursome spotted a Jackal standing in the room, his back to them. Mariana, having a severe hatred for these creatures since she was little, snuck up behind him and broke the creature's neck before it could cry out.

Continuing on, the group reached another set of doors. This time, there was an alert Jackal in that room. "Get in the shadows! They have poor sight!" Maria hissed rolling into the shadows herself, the other Spartans following suit. Watching the Jackal sniff the air, it apparently heard their boots, Mariana suddenly hatched an idea.

"What are you doing? You do not grovel before an almighty Elite?" she barked through her intercom in her beloved tongue, effectively spooking Sam, Kelly, John, and the Jackal.

"I-I'm sorry your Excellency," the Jackal squawked falling to his knees, "I didn't know you were invisible. A thousand apologies."

"You scum, you aren't worthy of my mercy," Mariana sneered. Looking out of the corner of her eye, she spotted Sam shift restlessly. Unfortunately, the Jackal spotted the movement and fired at Sam. "You imbecile!" Maria snapped, still in Elite and shot the Jackal in the throat. Running over to Sam, John helped Sam to his feet.

"Are you okay?" he asked. Sam nodded and winced as his armor brushed his side. Mariana looked skeptical, but continued on. Finally reaching the reactors, they armed the nukes they were carrying and set them in place.

"You three go on, I'll cover you and hold any forces off," Sam whispered as they crouched in the shadows.

"No, we're all in this together. You're coming too," Kelly replied stubbornly.

"Sam, stays behind," Mariana spoke up suddenly from where she was keeping her ears open on watch, "Kelly, look at Sam's side. The sealant is punctured. Sam won't survive the vacuum of space."

"It's alright Kelly," Sam said, "I'm prepared to die in battle rather than in a vacuum."

"Let's go," John said standing, "we have three minutes to get out of here."

With one final glance at Sam, the other two followed John out.

[illegible]

Ria: hmm, I can't think of anything else. I'm sorry for taking so long. My school was being a buttheadâ€”too many projects.

5. and they thought this would be easy

Disclaimer: I don't own Halo. I wish I did, because then I'd be rich. I do, however, own Spartan-150 also known as Mariana.

Mariana: sheafs through Ria's reviews Hey Ria, you've got a flame.

Ria: What does it say?

Mariana: This person says that if you're going to base this story on the books, you should stick to it more. continues to read He also says that it's not right that Mariana refuses to salute a superior.

Ria: well he can kiss my arse. 1) I only use the books as a reference. Besides, in the game, Master Chief is 41 years old, which is my dad's age and 2) Mariana adopted the Elites point of view on the humans. She may have been five, but she is unusually bright and perceptive, and she also sees no importance in the human rank system so refuses to salute on the sole idea of it being pointless.

Mariana: well there you have it. Ria, what are you planning for this chapter?

Ria: hmm, I'm trying to decide if I should do a part of the chapter based on Adadee or not. After all, I've been focusing on Mariana for quite a while. What do you think Mariana?

Mariana: do this one on my father. I want to know what's going on with him.

Ria: very well, the first page or so will be of Adadee because he'll get his fair share of time laterâ€¦ onward then!

****BY THE WAY**:** as of last chapter, YSF stopped helping me with this story. She figured I could handle this from now on. This is my first solo chapter, so be nice.

[illegible]

Adadee stood at a control panel surveying a report. It told an unbelievable tale of humans defeating and blowing up a starship. Clicking his mandibles in the equivalent of a shrug, knowing it wasn't his problem, the silver armored Elite dumped the report on a data disk and headed to where his superior was located.

After handing over the disk and returning to his station, Adadee let out a sigh. Planet work was dull for a soldier like him, but it kept his heart intact. About four years after Mariana had been separated from him, Adadee had filed for a transfer to get away from Tartarus. Then after another four years after he was recently promoted to silver armor, he transferred yet again. Since the only available position was on the Elite home planet, Adadee took it to get away from the fights for quite a while. Since every single time the flagship he was on would incinerate a human planet, Adadee would feel a pain in his heart as he wondered if Mariana would be on that planet and helpless to the destructive force.

"Thinking about your daughter again?" came a slightly teasing voice. Adadee turned and clicked his mandibles slightly at the crimson Elite.

"Don't you dare say you don't miss her Arkanee," Adadee said disapprovingly to his friend. Arkanee pushed himself off the wall where he had been leaning and joined Adadee at the panel.

"I never said that. Of course I miss her. In fact, the only reason I came here was to bring you back into battle," Arkanee started but trailed off when he saw Adadee's expression.

"I don't want to kill her by accident," came the quiet response.

"Which is why I arranged for us to be assigned to help explore constructs around the galaxy," Arkanee replied slyly.

"Constructs? What are you blabbering about this time?" Adadee asked mildly thinking Arkanee was joking.

"I'm not blabbering," Arkanee defended indignantly, "the Prophets believe that these constructs were made by the forerunners."

"The forerunners huh? I think that I'll take you up on your offer then," Adadee said now interested.

â€|

Mariana looked around the amphitheater and sighed. It seemed like only yesterday she and seventy-four other six-year-old kids were being marched down these stairs, all frightened except for her. In reality, it was about ten grueling years of hard fought battles and solo missions after they completed training. Mariana had spent about two years of her time training and playing guard dog for Sol and Earth. A boring job because nothing happened, so she transferred back to the battlefield once the Spartan program was revealed to the public.

"Mariana!" someone called. Mariana turned and saw John approaching her.

"Hello John," she replied with a good-natured smile when she saw the medals on John's dress uniform, "have fun these past years?"

"You should talk, you have more medals than I do," he teased and then became serious. "Did you find your father?" he asked quietly.

"No," she replied, "I checked yesterday though, and he's safe near Threshold."

John was about to reply, but stopped and saluted as Dr. Hasley and the UNSC renowned Captain Keyes entered. Mariana, after a second, followed suit, Keyes being the only human that she respected enough to salute.

Once they were told to sit, they listened to the briefing. It was about how the UNSC wanted the Spartans to disable a Covenant ship and take it back to their home world. Mariana as usual found ways to amuse herself since she was easily bored with briefings. 'They'd probably flip if they found out that I have a map of the galaxy and knowledge of the location of the Elite's home planet,' she mused with a small smirk as she and the other Spartans were dismissed.

A few days later, Mariana was summoned back to the military base. Once she arrived, she immediately noticed that there weren't any other Spartans there—and that suited her just fine.

"Mariana, I'm glad you could make it," Dr. Hasley said as she approached the Petty Officer, "If you'll follow me, I'm going to update your neural implants and then I have a pleasant surprise for you."

Mariana nodded and followed the mother figure of all of the Spartans. After the neural implant procedure, which Mariana didn't like because the assisting doctor wanted to cut her long (and way over the regulation limit) hair for the second time in her life in order to reach the neural implants easier. Of course Dr. Hasley sent the assistant away after he was threatened with castration, long painful death, various forms of torture, and disembowelment delivered by none other than Mariana.

"We really have to work on your attitude," Hasley joked as she finished up with the neural implants, "Come this way now."

Mariana obediently followed. "So what's my surprise?" she asked as she followed the doctor into a tent and stopped short. Suspended on a raised platform was a brand new suit of MJOLINR armor. "Is that?"

"Yours? Yes. It's the completed version of MJOLINR. Your old one was basically a prototype. This suit is yours and only yours because I integrated a slot for your little computer chip in the helmet." Dr. Hasley explained with a grin.

As Mariana was fitted with the new suit, Dr Hasley was pulling a data crystal out of a computer. "What is that doctor?"

"Well, you and John have been selected to protect the computer engineers that will be accompanying the Spartans," Hasley said as she went around to Mariana's neural slots and inserted the data crystal into a special slot.

Mariana jerked and tensed as a cool presence flowed into her mind and then warmed. Just as she was about to ask Dr. Hasley what the meaning of this was, she heard a familiar voice in her head.

"Still a trouble maker? I thought that in ten years you would mature, but no, you're as bad as ever," the voice said.

"A-Amee?" Mariana asked uncertainly.

"Very good! I missed you," the AI added softly.

"Are you the computer engineer?"

"Absolutely. Me and Cortana will be fulfilling your every hacking and operating needs," Amee replied proudly.

"Just do me a favor and stay out of my software. I don't trust anyone except me to use it."

"Why do you think I won't be able to use it?" Amee demanded.

"Open it up and see."

Mariana stood patiently while Amee opened the covenant software and the galaxy sprang up on her HUD. A moment's pause and then, "But this is in the language of the covenant! No one can read this!"

"No one?" Dr. Hasley asked amused, "I guess Mariana never told you that her 'father' is a Covenant Elite then?"

Mariana felt Amee process the equivalent of shock. "No way," she murmured, "Mariana, is this true?"

"Yes, I plan on finding him someday after the mission," Mariana replied stoutly.

"Mariana, we need to run a test to see how well you, Amee, and Cortana work well together," Dr. Hasley interrupted gently.

Mariana raised the visor on her helmet and Dr. Hasley saw her indigo eyes filled with surprise. "You mean to tell me that I have to carry two Ais! Won't my suit short circuit?" she demanded.

"No dimwit, I'm carrying Cortana. You don't mind running the course with me, do you?" John mocked lightly entering the tent.

"Watch it," Mariana growled, whirling around to glare at her friend who also had his visor up, "I could beat you now if I wanted."

"Try me," John challenged, getting into a stance, Mariana quickly following, both facing off, serious looks on their faces.

"Children!" a voice snapped from John's external speakers, startling the two Spartans out of their stances, "You're the only hope for Earth, and you're acting like spoiled children!"

John winced. "Cortana! Not so loud," he scolded. Mariana made a mental note to not get on Cortana's nerves again, even though she'd probably mouth off right back as always.

"Truce?" Mariana asked, offering her hand to John.

"Truce," John agreed, taking her gauntlet and kissing the back of it

in a gentlemanly manner.

"Now since you two are done with your antics, let's continue. The objective is simple. You must get through the course and ring the bell on the far end of it. Some of the ONI wish to see you two fail and may have planned some dangerous obstacles for you, so be careful," Dr. Hasley explained.

"We won't fail," Mariana said confidently, lowering her visor.

"I'm sure you won't. Once I leave count to ten slowly, and your test will begin," Dr. Hasley said and strode out of the tent as John lowered his visor.

"Just like when we were kids, eh Mariana?" John asked as the two stepped onto the raised platform and stood face to face.

"I remember. I count 10 Helljumpers around the outside. Five each and we don't have any weapons."

"Can you two take them? It's 5-1," Cortana stated.

"I've handled worse," Mariana replied and finished counting to ten just as three Helljumpers entered and opened fire. In a blur of movement, John formed his hands into a cradle, Mariana placed a foot into the cradle, and John vaulted her up and over to land silently behind the ODSs. The Helljumpers, not seeing this movement because it was too fast, opened fire on John, oblivious to the threat behind them. There was a whump and the ODS on the right flank crumpled weaponless beneath a harsh blow to the back.

John took advantage of the distraction and took out the left flank man. Both Spartans then gunned the last soldier in the tent and strode outside to face the remaining seven after policing the fallen soldiers' ammo. After dispatching the last seven in the same distract and attack method, Mariana and John headed towards the barracks, belly crawling under them to disappear from possible snipers.

Coming out to the gravel field, Mariana held John back suddenly. "I don't like this," she murmured, which surprised John. Normally nothing would phase the human Elite, but now she was hesitating.

"Cortana, Amee, can either of you find out what's spooking Mariana?" John asked.

Amee found it first. "I found a signal for Lotus mine activation! Mariana was right not to cross it."

"John, throw a grenade into the field. If it sets one off, I can determine the position of the others," Cortana instructed. John complied, and soon the two were picking their way across the field.

"That was brutally annoying," Mariana said irritably, her shoulders relaxing once they were across.

"I feel the same, but me and Cortana are picking up personally encrypted chatter between this base and Fairchild Airfield. I suggest continuing this course under the cover of those trees," Amee pointed

out.

John and Mariana headed to the razor wire and commenced taking down the chain guns that were aimed at them, while Amee and Cortana investigated what Fairchild Airfield was planning.

"Spartans! A SkyHawk was sent from Fairchild air field and is headed this way!" Cortana warned.

"To the pillars of Loki! Hurry Mariana!" John urged, grabbing Mariana's hand and sprinting to the next section. Climbing up onto the top of the ten-meter-tall poles, John and Mariana started to hop across the top, intent on landing perfectly and balancing a half ton of flesh, bone, and armor on the ten centimeter diameter poles.

As Mariana was hopping, her very sharp ears picked up a rumbling that was steadily growing louder. "Amee, what's that?"

Amee listened also. "It's the engines on the SkyHawk. I'm getting a lot of interference from the jetwash, so it's up to you to alert John," she said as the jet opened fire.

"John! Jump!" Mariana cried out as the pole below her was shredded to pulp from the jet's automatic cannons. John looked towards the cry since their hopping had put some distance between them, and saw Mariana plummeting towards the ground, and pillars exploding in a straight path at him.

Sliding down his pole till he reached the ground as it exploded, John ran to Mariana and helped her up. "Are you okay?" he asked.

"Don't worry about me, I'll be fine. We have to hurry. The SkyHawk will return and it'll use the Scorpion missiles next time," she said hurrying to the edge of another clearing.

"Stand behind me," John said, as he turned to face the jet, since both of them knew that they wouldn't be able to outrun the jet. Mariana nodded and moved behind John, wincing at the pain in her leg as she put weight on it.

"What are you planning to do?" she asked. John just looked at her and swiped the Spartan's signal of a smile on her visor.

"Just jump to the left when I tell you to," he answered. Both Spartans waited and suddenly, as the missile streaked towards them, John yelled, "Jump!"

Mariana dove to the side as John slapped the missile aside. When it detonated behind them, both flew six meters before crashing back down to the ground. Struggling to his hands and knees, John crawled to Mariana and rolled her over.

Mariana moved and turned so John could see his reflection in the visor of her helmet. "You son-of-a-bitch. You are the craziest person I ever knew," she said sourly.

"Don't I know it," he replied teasingly and then grew serious. "Can you stand?"

"I have no idea. I landed on the same leg that I landed on when I

fell off that damn pillar," Mariana said as she struggled to stand and started limping towards the bell. "If Father saw me now, he would reprimand me for getting injured," she said as John caught up and helped her so they could get to the bell before the SkyHawk could return.

"Is he that tough?" John asked as he rang the bell and they listened to Dr. Hasley give them instructions to stay put.

"He would think it would have been a pointless injury and made sure it didn't happen again. You would like him John. He's strict, but he knows the limits of anyone," she explained, sitting down and taking off her helmet. John raised his visor and looked at his friend with a small smile as a Pelican circled overhead to pick them up.

"If he's anything like you, I'm sure I will," he replied, and received a very rare, beaming smile from Mariana as the Pelican settled onto the grass

â€|

The next day all of the Spartans loaded all of their gear and themselves onto the Pillar of Autumn. That was the ship that would take them to find a Covenant ship. Mariana had finished her preparation first along with Kelly, and the two were sparring, seeing if Mariana's leg was truly all right from yesterday's test.

Attack, block, counter-attack, and start all over again and again. Going faster and faster until they entered their favorite phase, 'Spartan time,' which was when everything seemed to slow. Linda, another Spartan who was done, was watching Mariana's performance and making notes.

"You seem vengeful," Mariana pointed out to Kelly as she caught one of her opponent's legs and sent the armor-clad Spartan to the floor.

"I'm just angry that the Covenant seems to always be erasing our wins against them," Kelly replied as she got up and flipped Mariana, but the said Spartan landed on her feet and kept punching.

"In my opinion, anger and revenge are the same thing. If you're angry, you want revenge, and if you want revenge, you were obviously angry at one point in time," Mariana replied before John cut them off.

"Captain on deck!" he barked, and all thirty Spartans saluted Captain Keyes in unison and at attention.

"As you were," he replied with a smile. Mariana couldn't help but like the captain. He wasn't one of those snobs who think they know everything. "I just dropped by to extend my regards. Master Chief, if you or your menâ€|"

"And women," one of the Spartans that had been sparring interrupted.

"Spartan-150! Hush up!" Master Chief reprimanded.

"No Master Chief, she's right. I forgot the women. Let me try again.

"If you or your men and women need anything at all, don't hesitate to ask," Keyes finished, recognizing the one who had interrupted as Mariana. He would never forget that little sharp-tongued, raven-haired girl who used to spar with a tree at the orphanage they found her at.

"Sir," John replied, saluting as Keyes left. As soon as the captain was gone, he rounded on Mariana. "Can't you behave for once?" he demanded.

"Not necessarily," she replied smoothly and stretched her leg out.

"I should leave you to guard the _Autumn_ when we find a Covenant ship," John hissed.

The other Spartans held their breath, not wanting to set Mariana off any more than she already was about to. All of them knew about Mariana's upbringing. A long while ago, she had sought them out and told them, and they all still respected her.

"Leave me behind?" she growled, "I am the only one who is able to fly a covenant ship and be able to understand the transmissions! Remember, you can't order me around anymore. I am the same rank you are, _Master Chief_!"

John could only watch as Mariana stormed out of the room, knowing she'd be back after she cooled down. Looking at the other Spartans, he could tell that some of them wore looks of amusement. "Shut up," he muttered, going back to preparing his cryotube.

Mariana headed towards the Autumn's bridge, taking the long way around. Watching the doors slide open, she stepped slightly in. "Permission to enter the bridge."

"Granted Spartan-150," Mariana," Keyes replied, turning. Mariana strode to him and took her helmet off, causing her raven hair to tumble down her back.

"How did you know who I was?" she asked curiously.

"Well, I remembered your tendency to disregard the authority of superiors, seeing as you didn't salute," not that I care," he started with a chuckle at her shocked expression, "And secondly, Dr. Hasley gave me an accurate description of your unique suit build."

Mariana ran a gloved hand over her armor. It was true that her armor was built differently. It was lighter and more mobile, and the helmet was built less blocky and more streamlined. In fact, it reminded her a lot of her father's armor.

"I take it that you are going to be the Spartan in charge of the covenant ship?" Lieutenant Dominique asked as Mariana sealed her helmet shut again.

"Correct. I'm probably the only human who knows just about everything on the Covenant," Mariana would have continued, but an incoming transmission interrupted her.

There was a few second pause, and then Lieutenant Dominique cried

out, "The transmission was from FLEETCOM HQ. Sir, the Covenant are attacking Reach!"

Not even a minute later, Mariana was sprinting back towards the Spartan's quarters when the ship turned, sending her into the wall. "Damn Ensign Lovell," she snarled, tapping into the communication link. "John!" she shouted, "Covenant are attacking Reach! We're turning back!"

"What?" John demanded and then fell silent, knowing that she never lied, "Fine, get back to our quarters and we'll think of something."

Reaching the storage bay-turned quarters, Mariana barely had time to catch her breath before Keyes arrived. Once he briefed them all, John gave orders. He wanted Mariana to return to the bridge to provide the crew with tactical information on how to keep the Autumn safe. Mariana was silent for a minute, and John knew she was checking to see if her father was there. Finally she nodded in consent and departed for the bridge.

Since they had been at the system's edge, the Spartans and the Autumn's crew could do nothing but watch the slaughter. "Cortana, what's the damage report?"

Cortana was silent and then reported that one hundred UNSC ships were destroyed. While Cortana was talking, Mariana had gripped one of the rails in a death hold, fuzzy memories of screaming and death by the covenant coming back to her after god knows how long.

"Mariana, are you alright?" Keyes asked.

"I'm fine," Mariana said after taking a few ragged breaths and looked up. "Captain, the covenant's turning around. They're coming back," she said, pointing towards the viewscreen.

Cortana appeared on the holo panel. "It gets worse, there's an unsecured NAV database on the Reach space dock."

"Shit," Mariana swore. "John, what are we going to do?" she asked, knowing that Cortana had sent the others the transmissions.

John appeared on one of the view screens. "Captain Keyes, I'm requesting that you allow my team to split. One small group will go onto the space dock and retrieve the NAV database, and the other will go to Reach's surface and protect the MAC gun generators."

Keyes thought, tapping his pipe against his chin. At first he declined, but John effectively argued, so he granted the request. "Mariana," John said through the Spartan's intercom, "You're coming with me, Linda, and James on the space op. Prepare and meet us in the launch bay in about five minutes."

"Understood," Mariana replied. She then pulled Amee's data crystal from her helmet and turned to Keyes. "Captain, do you think you could hold onto this until I get back? She's another AI. She will help Cortana with offensive and defense if you wish." she asked, holding out the crystal.

Keyes nodded and took the crystal. Mariana left, grabbing some

weaponry from a weapon's locker as she headed towards the launch bay. She couldn't help but feel the sense of foreboding that surrounded this mission.

[illegible]

Ria: well, that's all for this chapter. Review and I'll update ASAP

6. SNAFU situation normal, all f'd up

Disclaimer: I don't own Halo. I wish I did, because then I'd be rich. I do, however, own Spartan-150 also known as Mariana.

Mariana: Are you sure you're breathing? nudges Ria with her boot

Ria: deep, exaggerated breath and then grins ha, I'm not dead

Mariana: And why didn't you do this sooner?

Ria: I had other things.

Mariana: bullshit.

Ria: I have another author account okay? I have been busy with those stories.

Mariana: And?

Ria: Iâ€|lost the Halo books? Runs from Mariana I found them though!

[illegible]

Mariana entered the docking bay five minutes later and spotted John. He, Linda, and James were busy running through the pre-flight checks on their suped-up Pelican. Climbing onto the nose, Mariana accepted the can of C-12 that John tossed up and set to work adding more explosives to the nose. Cortana had uploaded a schematic of the station to her HUD, so she knew that what they had wouldn't be enough.

"Mariana, get in here! We'll have to make do," John called up a few minutes later.

Mariana signaled her acknowledgement and swung down settling into the copilot seat as John took off. During the ride she just sat there, eyes closed.

"Mariana, are you all right?" John asked through a private COM link.

"Yes, I'm just thinking about something that happened when we were watching the firefight," she replied with a sigh.

"What was it?"

"I never told anyone this, but father's starship glassed my planet when I was only about two years old. I lost all of my memory except my name and age. I never remembered what I saw or heard when my birthplace got glassed until today when Cortana was reading off the damage to the UNSC fleet," the normally stotic soldier replied in a whisper.

"Well, what did you see?" John pressed.

"Death upon death, destruction and screams."

John winced and looked over at Mariana. Noticing the rigid position, he placed a gloved hand on her shoulder sympathetically. Mariana didn't move except to clasp that hand quickly.

Turning back to the viewport, John noticed that they were getting close. "Get ready Spartans, prepare for braking."

"In other words, strap in, or go flying across the pelican," James joked, gripping his thruster pack tightly.

Mariana rolled her eyes and tightened her harness as she felt herself jerk forward from the momentum. "John, don't you think we're going in too fast?" she asked as the proximity alert started to beep at 1,000 km.

"Acknowledged," John replied, "Take control of the steering while I make adjustments." Mariana grabbed her steering yoke and held it steady while John squelched the alarm. Just as he took his hand away, the alarm sounded again.

"Covenant," Mariana swore at the same time that John let out a low growl of annoyance.

"Linda, James, brace for maneuvering!" John ordered, stopping the momentum with a reverse burn and cut the power. Unfortunately, he initiated the reverse burn too late. Mariana lost control of the steering, and the pelican spun a few times before it crashed into the station tail first, the impact whiplashing the four Spartans.

"Oops," Mariana muttered as she got over her disorientation.

"Any injuries?" Master Chief asked.

Linda and James reported that they were all right, Mariana bracing her left leg and pushing on it before replying that she was fine as well. "Now that we know that everyone is fine, let's collect as much ammo as we can and get to cover ASAP," John said

Getting outside in zero-gravity, the four clipped their tethers to the hull of the pelican and observed where they were. "James," John said motioning to the nose, "Police those explosives." James nodded and floated off. A sudden flash distracted John and Mariana, Linda still scoping the area with her sniper rifle. Apparently the MAC guns had discovered the new covenant threat.

"Sir, incoming objects," Linda reported, tearing the two Chiefs from watching the fight.

Mariana looked up and chinned the control in her helmet to magnify the view. What she saw made her gasp. "John! Covenant dropships accompanied by Elites in space suits! I suggest getting into the station!"

"There's too much of a distance. Linda, Mariana, take cover under the Pelican. Linda, snipe as many as you can from there. James! Take what you have and get back here double time!" John ordered. Mariana and Linda quickly complied, tethering themselves to the belly of the pelican and turned to watch James.

James almost had the explosives free when the Elites spotted him and fired. Multiple needler projectiles showered down on James, mainly bouncing off and not doing him harm until one struck his thruster pack and penetrated before exploding a second later. James was spun around in microgravity by the uncontrolled jets. Losing his hold, James crashed into the space station, bounced off, and rocketed away into space, tumbling end over end out of control.

"Blue-Two! James, come in!" John called.

"Canâ€|controlâ€|" Mariana heard James saying over the COM channel, his voice filled with static, making it very hard to understand, "They'veâ€|everywhereâ€|" The three remaining Spartans fell silent as the COM link went dead and James vanished into the darkness.

"Incoming dropships," Mariana reported finally, watching a dropship land twenty meters away.

"Blue-One, Blue-Three, let's pave a path out of here," John said after a moment.

"Yes sir," Linda and Mariana replied enthusiastically, sniping the emerging jackals where their shields didn't cover their bodies. John helped them with his assault rifle, bracing himself against the pelican. Once his clip was spent, he pulled out a grenade, primed it, and bounced it into the far side of the dropship. When it detonated, a freeze-dried spray of blue blood flew up.

"Girls, secure that landing pod. It will give us better cover," John then ordered. Mariana and Linda slung their rifles and pulled themselves hand over hand to the pod while John climbed up to explosives and wedged two grenades into the C-12. Joining them at the covenant dropship, John looked back and saw at least a hundred Jackals and several Elites swarming about the Pelican.

"Linda, two new targets on the Pelican's nose. Spot them annd wait for my mark."

Linda aimed and patiently waited. Firing when John gave the order, she shot the grenades and set off a huge chain reaction. When the shockwave died off, John looked at the space dock surface that was clear except for a huge crater where the Pelican had been.

"Let's go," he said, drifting to the crater. Once the three were inside and on the B level, John and Linda started down the hall after setting a Lotus mine. "Mariana, aren't you coming?" he asked, noticing that her FOF tag hadn't moved from its spot except to drift

down the hall a little to where it stopped when she securely wedged her body into a tight-fitting crevice off to the side.

"No, I'll cover your six. I have plenty of ammo left, so I'll be fine," she replied, disabling her FOF tag.

"Fine, but when I call, you fall back to our position immediately," John said, not liking leaving his companion there.

"Acknowledged." John moved back to Linda and the two Spartans continued down. Reaching the docking bay, John and Linda started firing on the Jackals that were pinning down some Marines. The Marines threw grenades at the Jackals, but none fell when the grenades exploded. A few seconds later, another explosion rippled through the deck, but from behind them.

"Linda, I'm going to go check on Mariana's status," John said, "you keep firing. I have a bad feeling about something. Do you think that you can take the Jackals out?"

Linda nodded and waved him on. John drifted back down the hall and spotted a flicker of a contact on his radar but then vanished. Stopping himself, John looked warily around him, but saw only the dim emergency lighting and shadows—but then one of the shadows moved.

Bringing his assault rifle to bear, John's eyes widened when he saw the Elite emerge from the shadows. This was the first time that he had seen one of these. The Elite was a meter taller than him and wore blue armor. The helmet was elongated to protect the mouth, which John saw consisted of four mandibles. The creature looked like it was smiling at him as it raised a plasma rifle.

Before it could fire, John pushed himself off of the wall and slammed into the Elite. Fighting blow for blow, John managed to kill the Elite's shields. Suddenly, the Elite writhed and howled soundlessly in the vacuum. John spotted flashes of blue behind the Elite and drifted backward cautiously towards his dropped assault rifle.

"Don't worry, he's dead. That's what I hate about rookie Elites. They are too damn overconfident," a familiar and welcome voice filtered through John's speakers.

Mariana emerged from the shadows, her two guns slung and holding two plasma rifles, one in each hand.

"Where did you get those?" John asked.

Mariana shrugged and John knew she was smirking. "One was the one this moron dropped, and the other was floating by my face when I woke up," she replied drifting to John, who wrapped his arms around her to hold her steady.

"Woke up?"

"I thought I was far enough away from the mine explosion, but the shockwave knocked me cold. The only one that got through was that floating carcass right there. The hallway is all blocked now."

"Ah, let's get back and give Linda a hand," John replied. The two Chiefs drifted back quickly.

"The Jackals are learning, they're overlapping their shields," Linda reported.

"We could always try that Pelican," Mariana suggested, pointing to the craft not far from their position.

"Good idea, I'll go," John said before propelling himself to the Pelican.

"You know, he did that without waiting for our acknowledgement because he had yet to show off," Mariana pointed out on a private COM link to Linda, who barked a laugh and continued sniping.

John got the Pelican free and swung it around, opening the back hatch. "Get in, I'm picking up thousands of contacts on the Pelican's radars."

Linda climbed into the copilot seat as Mariana and the Marines piled into the back. "What happened to your foot?" One of the Marines, his tag reading Sgt. Johnson, asked Mariana as John opened up the Circumference like a tin can and went for the NAV database, Linda taking the controls.

Mariana looked down at her foot. It was lip and pointing in the wrong direction. "Broke it," she replied with a shrug.

John entered a few seconds later. He shared a quick conversation with Linda, who passed Mariana a few seconds later. "Where're you going?" Mariana asked.

"I'm manually opening the bay doors. The station AI isn't responding," she replied. Mariana lifted herself up and watched from the safety of the back hatch. Linda got the door open and time seemed to stand still as the Covenant shot her in the back and proceeded to hammer her with plasma.

John swung the Pelican around to shield her and the Marines loaded Linda into the back. As soon as they were all in, John sealed the Pelican and rocketed into space. Handing the controls to Sgt. Johnson, John went and knelt next to Linda.

"We got the data, right?" Linda asked weakly.

"Yes," John replied.

"Good, we won then." With that, Linda went limp and her vital signs went super low.

John set Linda down carefully and went to Mariana. "Does it hurt?" he asked, gesturing to her foot.

"No, the nerve endings must be pinched enough to not feel it," she replied, gasping as John shifted it carefully to determine the extent of the break.

"I'll set it once we get to the Autumn. I want to cryo Linda first so we have a chance to save her," he said before putting a folded up

I do, however, own Spartan-150 also known as Mariana.

A/N: Just so you know, for those of you who hadn't read the books, I'm cutting out two battles towards the end of the chapter because they're pretty straight forward in the book, and they leave me no creative movement.

[illegible]

"Promise me you'll be here when I wake up," she said as she lay down in the tube and the clear cover slid on.

"I promise," John whispered, watching her vital stats grow sluggish as she fell asleep from the gasses, "I'll be right here when you awake." Once he was sure Mariana was asleep, John headed to the bridge.

"Master Chief, I take it that the NAV database was destroyed?" Captain Keyes asked when John approached.

"Yes sir," John replied, "Captain Keyes, can you scan for active FOF tags? One of my Spartans is floating out there."

Keyes nodded and had Lieutenant Dominique scan for James. "Sir, I have a lock on a FOF tag. It's being brought into one of the UNSC cruisers that are still operational. I'll see what the Spartan's condition is," he replied after a minute.

John stood rigid for what seemed like an eternity before Lieutenant Dominique turned back around. "Master Chief sir, your Spartan is in a coma, but Med techs on that ship say he will live. Diagnostics are incomplete, but they think he was out in the cold for a little too long and sustained minor injuries," the Lieutenant replied.

John visibly relaxed and felt weary as the adrenaline ebbed out of his system. "Master Chief, go get some rest. We are going to be going into slipspace, so you have plenty of time to catch some shut eye," Keyes ordered. John nodded and made his way back to the cryo bay and eased himself into the cryotube next to Mariana. As he fell asleep, John checked on Mariana. She was long past the REM cycle and seemed if she was in suspended animation. Smirking to himself, John knew that it'd be hell getting her to wake up since she tended to flail coming out of cryosleep.

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"John!" came a voice floating on his mind. "John, you have to get up. Covenant are attacking the Autumn," the voice urged more clearly and John recognized the voice that was coming over his speakers. Opening his eyes as soon as he was able to, John looked up and saw another Spartan standing on the other side of the cryotube door.

"Mariana?" he asked, noticing the smooth shape of the armor and the way the Spartan leaned her weight on her right foot to keep it off of a broken ankle.

"Yep," she replied as the glass door to the tube opened and she helped him out, "Like I said when you were still in la-la land."

Covenant are on the way. Let's get your shields and stuff back to normal and go give them a warm welcome."

John nodded and flexed his stiff muscles. "How long have I been out?" he asked.

"For about three hours. At least that's what Cortana told me."

As John stood patiently while the technician recharged his shields, he looked Mariana over. "How is it that you're able to walk?" he asked.

"Easy, I locked the joint on my boot for extra stability. I can't run well yet, but I can scuttle pretty good," she replied looking down at the armor that concealed the cast on her foot.

John nodded and at that moment, the Intercom crackled. "Bridge to Cryo Two—This is Captain Keyes. Send the Spartans to the bridge immediately."

The technician was about to protest, but Keyes put the tech in his place quickly. As the two headed for the exit, they heard the whine of plasma weapons and looking up, saw covenant in the observation theater gunning down the tech up there. "Let's get out of here," Mariana muttered, loping towards the door as fast as she could go.

The technician pushed ahead and was rewarded for his hurry by being blown up as the next door exploded. Mariana and John skidded to a stop, both doubting that the shield system in their armor would be able to protect them from that inferno of a fire. John looked around and spotted a second passageway on the other side of two power conduits. Pointing it out to Mariana, the two Spartans leapt over them and continued down this hall.

Pushing their way through the doors that had half-melted from the blast on the other side of the wall, Mariana and John found themselves in a dark room, lit only by a half-raised blast door. Ducking to see under, John waited for the crewmen and repellers to push the covenant into the air lock before crawling under the door and then turning and giving Mariana a hand.

"I'm not made of lace you know," she growled, but accepted the help as her locked boot joint made her stumble. The two then were forced to ignore the various fights seeing as they had no weapons and work their way to the bridge. Upon reaching the bridge, John and Mariana saw a vast construct out of the viewport. "Cortana or Amee will fill us in," Mariana said to John over a private COM link.

John nodded and approached the Captain. "Captain Keyes, reporting as ordered sir," John said snapping a crisp salute.

Captain Keyes turned and nodded to both Spartans. "Good to see you both. Cortana and Amee did their best, but it just wasn't enough," he said

Amee and Cortana exchanged looks from where they were standing together on the holopanel and Amee rolled her eyes, her body shifting to amethyst with Lapis Lazuli eyes and hair as Cortana arched an eyebrow. "A dozen Seraphs against a single Halcyon-class

cruiserâ€|With those odds, we are quite content with threeâ€|make that four kills," Cortana replied before turning to the Spartans.

"Sleep well?" Amee asked the two cheerfully in spite of the situation.

Before either could answer, another blast hit the ship, causing it to rock violently. John grabbed onto a support pillar and held on as Mariana lost her balance, and fell at his feet. A tidal wave of pain shot up through her leg and all the way to her brain, causing her to see stars and become disoriented. As her head cleared, Mariana growled to herself and released the boot hinge. Pulling herself up, she heard John, Captain Keyes, and Cortana talking about abandoning the _Autumn_ and trying to land it on the construct.

"Mariana, if you've been listening, you're going to stay out of the fight. I'll get some of my crew to get you down to the launch bay safely enough and you're going to take a pelican down to the surface," Keyes told her.

"What about John?" she asked, accepting Amee's crystal from John and sliding it into its slot on her helmet.

"I'm going to go stall the Covenant as long as I can and then get on a lifeboat. You're only going on a pelican because they're closer, and you can't run," John replied. Coming closer, he wiped the Spartan's smile signal on Mariana's faceplate before leaving. Mariana's shoulders slumped and she took a full five seconds to collect herself and push off of the wall where she had been supporting herself.

Going with some crewmen, Mariana got to the launch bay all right. Left alone since the crew personnel had to return to the bridge, Mariana stood in the center and looked around. As of right then, the pilots hadn't reached the bay yet.

"Mariana, what are you doing?" Amee asked as Mariana headed to a weapons locker and pulled out an assault rifle, ammo, and grenades.

"Easy," she replied, slapping a clip into the rifle, "I'm going to take out any Covenant that may try to destroy my ticket out of here." Amee just sighed and fell quiet. Mariana knelt down and waited. Sure enough, Mariana soon spotted the colors of Covenant armor and fired in sustained bursts.

She was so effective, that when the Pelican pilots arrived in the bay, the first thing they saw was Mariana calmly reloading her rifle, Covenant corpses scattered in the entry and no farther than twenty feet in. "Foehammer, will you be willing to have an extra passenger to the surface?" Mariana asked.

Captain Rawley smiled briefly. "If you can help out with the flight, hop aboard," she replied.

Mariana nodded curtly and started to board when her motion tracker picked up contacts. "You didn't tell me you were being followed," she growled, slinging her rifle and switching to a pistol and activated the zoom. In a matter of a minute, the ten Covenant aliens were down

for the count. Boarding through the rear hatch, Mariana sealed the hatch door and fastened herself in. A moment later, they were on their way.

Mariana closed her eyes and tried to ignore the shaking ship when the ship lurched and she was thrown against her harness. "Sorry Mariana, we hit an air pocket and dropped straight down a bit," Foehammer apologized.

"Don't worry about me, just concentrate on your ship," Mariana tried to say as the ship's shaking jarred her teeth, "I just want to land in one piece alive if it's not too much to ask." Foehammer let loose a strained laugh and cut the channel.

Besides the descent to the ring's turbulence, nothing else eventful really happened. Mariana, soon feeling the turbulence stop, got up and went to a viewport. Ignoring the pain throbbing against her armor, Mariana looked down at lush forests and plains, bordered by distant mountains.

"Where are we landing, Foehammer?" Mariana questioned, tearing her gaze away from the landscape long enough to ask the question.

"This is where you come in. I'm told you have extensive knowledge of any type of strategy. I'll let you pick the best spot," Foehammer replied.

Mariana limped to the hatch that Foehammer opened to give her a better view now that they were safely in the atmosphere, and looked out. Seeing a large clearing in a patch of woods, Mariana consulted with Ameer and then dropped a NAV marker on it. "There, that looks like the best this area has," Mariana replied finally.

Immediately Mariana felt the Pelican turn and descend on the clearing. Once they landed, the crews swept the area and found no Covenant. Mariana took the given time to take off her helmet and relax for a minute before reaching into a compartment on her armor and taking out a small first aid kit. Filling her ankle with the biofoam, Mariana then popped a painkiller and resealed her helmet.

"What's up Ameer? You seem oddly quiet," Mariana wondered.

"Oh, I'm just talking to Wellsley's Major Silva's AI. Apparently the Helljumpers are grouping about ten clicks south of us. We will rendezvous with them tomorrow morning," Ameer explained.

"Granted that one of our groups aren't attacked beforehand," Mariana snorted before lying down and deciding to take a nap within the safety of Foehammer's pelican.

â€|

That night, Mariana was taking her turn on patrol, the Biofoam already working wonders on her ankle when Mariana heard footsteps.

"Who's there?" she demanded, bringing her rifle to bear.

"Whoa, don't shoot!" came a voice, "Helljumper C Company reporting to

the pelicans as ordered."

Mariana kept her rifle up and flicked on her helmet light. In the beam stood about twenty Helljumpers with about thirty more behind them in the shadows. "Why are your FOF tags not on?" she demanded, lowering her rifle.

"We didn't want to attract the attention of any Covenant," the ODST replied. Mariana huffed and led them back to the small campfire since it was time to change shifts anyway. The rest of the night consisted of sleeping and patrolling for all of them. Even the ODSTs had helped, explaining that it was only fair.

Early the next morning, before the sun rose, the Pelicans loaded up and flew all fifty Marines and Mariana to the temporary base. Mariana stepped down when the Pelican landed and looked around. Seeing Major Silva, Mariana sighed in resignation and headed over to him.

"Major, Master Chief Spartan-150 reporting for duty," Mariana said, standing at attention but as always, not saluting.

"You know you should really salute to superiors," Silva stated, turning to look at the armor-clad soldier.

Mariana bit back a growl. "Let's get a few things straight, _sir_, I only will salute Keyes and no one else. I'm not a Helljumper, so I'm not technically under your command. I will help you, but I refuse to take orders from someone I probably could snap in half if I really wanted to try," she hissed, hearing Ameer chuckle in the back of her mind.

Silva bristled and then seemed to accept it for the time being. "How well can you shoot Spartan-150?"

"Not as good as my one teammate, but I am a dead shot with a rocket launcher," she replied with a shrug. Silva nodded and motioned for her to take a spot next to the other rocket jockeys, one of them passing her an extra launcher after she complied.

A harrowing battle later, Mariana found herself back in a Pelican, flying to the top of a nearby butte. Seeing the Covenant scrambling, trying to get into a counter formation, Mariana sighed, feeling like she should be able to spot or realize something. Leaping down, Mariana joined the Marines in fighting for the butte.

â€|

Mariana grumbled to herself as she patrolled through the covenant corpses. Silva, being the bastard he was, assigned her with the task of executing any Elite and Jackal still alive and tying up the Grunts. Rolling a crimson Elite over, Mariana brought her rifle to bear when it groaned, but dropped it in surprise when she spotted and recognized a scar that crossed under the Elite's left eye.

Dropping to her knees, she took off her helmet and held the Elite's hand. "A-Arkanee," she whispered.

Arkanee weakly opened his eyes as Mariana blinked back tears of happiness and sorrow. "Ameer? I must be dreaming," Arkanee stated, looking into the indigo eyes above him.

"No Arkanee," Mariana replied, in the Elite tongue, "it's me. I missed you and Daddy so much. He didn't die up here, did he?"

"I know you missed us," Arkanee soothed, reaching up a hand to stroke the soft black hair. "Anamee, you must listen carefully since I know my wound is fatal and I will transcend the physical soon. Your father was not here. He is close, in orbit in fact, on the flagship. He is a black armored Elite now. A year ago, Adadee was awarded the black armor because he chose to go into special ops. Anamee, you must let him know somehow that you are alive and on this ringâ€" Arkanee trailed off as his eyes closed, his grip went limp, and he stopped breathing.

Mariana bit down on her bottom lip to stop the one thing she always hated doingâ€"cry. Sealing her helmet once more, Mariana stood and after folding Arkanee's hands over his body walked off. Seeing as she had some free time now, Mariana started going around, picking an Elite corpse of every color armor available: blue, cobalt, crimson, silver, and gold. Once she had one of each, she relieved the aliens of their armor and carried it to her issued quarters. Getting out of her armor, Mariana sighed and went to take a shower, feeling that she needed it.

Twenty minutes later found her on the butte, waist-length hair twisted up off her neck. Going to the edge, she spotted Foehammer returning to the butte. "Bus rides?" she asked the pilot as it landed and let off Marines.

Foehammer chuckled. "They're survivors that Master Chief is rounding up," she explained. Mariana stood back as Foehammer lifted off again and stalked to where some Marines were stacking the covenant bodies onto a lift.

"Want help?" she asked.

One of the Helljumpers looked up and nodded. "You can grab that last Elite body if you can lift it," he replied. Mariana snorted and went to the Elite to notice vaguely that it was Arkanee. Picking up the body, Mariana placed him carefully on the pile of Elites.

"I know this sounds wrong, but it looks like the aliens are having a mass orgy," a second Helljumper stated. The other two Helljumpers laughed as the lift descended, and even Mariana couldn't help but crack the tiniest of smiles.

After helping bury the bodies, Mariana returned to her quarters to see someone waiting with his back to the door of her tent-like cubicle. About to ask who it was, Mariana noted the muscles rippling in the back of the arms, and the tall proud form of the male. "John!" she exclaimed, launching herself into his arms when he turned around, "You're safe!"

John smiled and hugged Mariana in return. "Of course," he chided, "I'm beat from rescuing Marines though. How are you feeling?" When Mariana didn't respond at first, John grew concerned. Pulling his friend away from his body gently, John looked into her eyes to notice that Mariana's eyes were shining with tears. "What's wrong?" he asked.

Mariana immediately started to cry silent tears. "T-The Elite who helped my father raise me was on this butte. He was fatally wounded by an assault rifle," she whimpered.

John pulled Mariana into another hug and rubbed her back gently, surprised at the rush of emotion. "What about your father?" he asked softly, feeling the girl's tears seep into his shoulder.

Mariana pulled away and took a minute to compose herself. "Arkanee told me before he died that Adadee was still on the flagship they were assigned to. I hope he stays there so I don't accidentally kill him," she murmured. "By the way, where are you quarters?" Mariana asked, changing the subject.

John smiled a toothy grin. "I was assigned to this cubicle with you. They're suppose to be looking for another cot for me to use," he smiled. Mariana nodded and guided John to her cot.

"Just use mine for now," she explained at John's look. John nodded and laid down, falling asleep in a few minutes. Mariana sat on the edge of the cot for a few minutes thinking about her father, eager to see him again after eleven years. Finally getting tired, Mariana laid herself down next to John and drifted off to sleep.

[illegible]

Ria: well, that's all for this chapter. I am sooo sorry that I took forever to upload, but as one of you know, I was in Egypt since April and I only came back maybe two weeks ago. Review and I promise that I will get the next chapter up sooner!

P.S. The Pyramids were amazing! Such heightsâ€makes you wonder where the dirt from the ramps used to get the blocks that high went toâ€
o.O Maybe one of you know. If so, tell me.

End
file.